

Cape Fear River. Southport was built in 1748 as part of Fort Johnston, named for Colonial Gov. Gabriel Johnston. The fort, which burned in 1775, was rebuilt around 1800 and later used by the Confederate Army, though only the officers' quarters remain.

The Cape Fear River's headwaters are located in the Piedmont region of the state. The river was discovered in 1524 by Giovanni da Verrazzano. It has had several names, but "Cape Fear" became the final designation because the southern tip of Smith Island (now Bald Head Island), at the river's mouth, was the site of many narrow escapes from navigational mishaps.

A state ferry runs from Southport across the river to Fort Fisher. Now a state historic site, Fort Fisher protected the river during the Civil War and was the site of the largest land and sea assault by U.S. forces prior to D-Day in World War II. A museum, as well as one of North Carolina's three aquariums, is located at the Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.



**Length: Three miles**  
**Drive Time: 10 minutes**  
**County: Brunswick**

